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SUBJECT Construction of the Volga-Don Canal

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1. Beginning of the fall of 1948, great numbers of German PWs were concentrated in the Krasnoarmeisk (48°31'N/44°34'E) and Kalach (48°43'N/43°31'E) areas. A Soviet engineer stated that in the summer of 1949 about 15,000 PWs and about 90,000 Soviet convicts were employed on the canal in the Krasnoarmeisk-Kalach area and that the number of Soviet convicts was planned to be increased to 150,000 by 1950. Numerous camps were built for these workmen. Two camps, capable of accommodating 41,000 men, were erected in Krasnoarmeisk. One was called Gorod Vokhre (phonetic spelling). A so-called desert camp for 60,000 workers was established near the village of Chapurniki (48°25'N/44°36'E) and was already occupied by 10,000 to 12,000 men in December 1949. Several small camps were in Ivanovka (48°29'N/44°23'E), Tsybenko (48°35'N/44°10'E), Karpovka, Gavrilovka (48°31'N/44°11'E), Novy Rogachik (48°40'N/44°03'E) and Marinovka (48°42'N/43°48'E). Another large convict camp was near Kalach.
 2. The canal is about 120 km long beginning at Krasnoarmeisk in a dry branch of the Volga River and extending to Kalach via Chapurniki-Ivanovka-Gavrilovka-Tsybenko-Novy Rogachik-Karpovka-Marinovka, and reaching the Don River downstream from Kalach. From the Don River to the Volga River there is a difference in level of 16 meters. The canal, the Don River being higher than the Volga River, after completion will be fed by water from the Don and will have 36 locks. Each lock will raise or lower a ship 2 meters. Lock No 1 will be built near Krasnoarmeisk, 300 meters from the point where the canal reaches the branch of the Volga River. Lock numbers 2 and 3 will be between Krasnoarmeisk and Chapurniki. Lock No 4 will be built near Chapurniki. Lock numbers 5 through 35 are along the stretch between Chapurniki and Kalach. Lock number 36 will be erected where the canal branches from the Don River downstream to Kalach.
 3. The canal was being built under the supervision of the MVD. A construction staff with headquarters in Kalach was appointed for the operations and has the designation Volga-Donstroy. Each section of the canal was under a special section chief. For example, chief of the Krasnoarmeisk construction section was MVD Major Rotkehl (fnu).

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4. Current for the construction of the canal was supplied by a power station 3 km northwest of Sarepta (48°30'N/44°32'E) and the Beketovka power station (48°35'N/44°20'E). In 1948, iron masts for a 60,000 volt overhead line from Beketovka to Kalach were erected.
5. In the summer of 1949, 11 excavators were put into operation at the Krasnoarmeisk construction section. There was also a floating pump station which the Russians called Zemsnayats (phonetic spelling). The pump had a capacity of 500 cubic meters per hour. The number of excavators working in the other building sections was not known. Four floating pump stations were in operation in the Kalach district; the largest one available for the construction of the canal had a capacity of 1,200 cubic meters per hour. A Soviet engineer said that the excavating operations in the Kalach section were nearly completed in December 1949. He also stated that a total of 700,000 to 800,000 cubic meters of earth and mud were excavated in the Kalach district by December 1949. 180,000 cubic meters were excavated in the Krasnoarmeisk section during the period from May to October 1949. The material excavated was deposited in the former clay pits of an old brickyard near Krasnoarmeisk near the canal bed. For 1950, the removal of 1,000,000 cubic meters of earth and mud was scheduled for the Krasnoarmeisk section with additional floating pump stations to be employed.
6. By December 1949, the canal bed on the Krasnoarmeisk section was excavated in the direction of Chapurniki, beginning at its junction with the branch of the Volga River where only a narrow strip remained. The canal bed was 45 meters wide and five meters deep. Lock number 1 was built 300 meters from the junction of the Volga River branch. The first lock of the canal was 8 to 9 meters deep and 60 meters wide. The lock chamber was 210 meters long. Behind the lock, the canal was 45 meters wide and five meters deep. The second construction section began in Chapurniki and was to connect with the canal at Krasnoarmeisk. In December 1949, the two excavation groups were only 1.5 km apart. *
7. The motor pool of the Volga-Donstroy was in Krasnoarmeisk and, in December 1949, had 300 trucks. Most of them were dump trucks.
8. During the period from the fall of 1948 to December 1949, a road was built on the northern bank running parallel with the canal. The road bed consisted of gravel 0.4 meters thick and layers of sand. The surface was of tar. It was 5 to 7 meters wide. Soviet workmen said that the road would be improved after the canal was completed. A link was built from the Rudutovo (48°25'15"N/44°23'E) railroad station to the road along the canal. The road crosses the canal by means of a wooden bridge, 50 meters long.
9. A single track Soviet wide gauge railroad line was built on the southern bank of the canal from Krasnoarmeisk. Six km of this line were finished in December 1949.

* [] Comment. The statements on the number of locks, length of the canal, and the difference in level conflict with official press information issued by the Soviet government. According to these official statements, the canal is 101 km long and has 12 locks. The watersheds of the Don River near Kalach is about 36 meters higher than that of the Volga River. Official information on the width and depth of the canal is not available. A width of 45 meters and a depth of five meters seem small. It is assumed that, after completion, the canal will have a width at the water level of about 60 to 65 meters and a depth of about 7 to 8 meters. These data would be consistent with the reported length of 210 meters of the lock chamber.

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